

Rothman-Saxton Lead Congressional Effort to Stop Swiss Investment in Iran's Energy Sector

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Contact: Kimberly Allen/Rothman, (202) 226-8364

Jeff Sagnip/Saxton, (609) 261-5800

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Letter to Swiss President Calls for International Unity in Opposition to Iran's Quest for Nuclear Weapons and Ongoing Support of Known Terrorist Organizations

(Washington, DC)-Today, U.S. Representatives Steve Rothman (D-NJ) and Jim Saxton (R-NJ) launched a bipartisan effort backed by 25 other Members of Congress to pressure Swiss President Pascal Couchepin to cancel a \$42 billion energy agreement signed between a Swiss energy company and Iran. The Islamic Republic continues to defy international law by seeking nuclear weapons technology and supporting known terrorist organizations. The Rothman-Saxton letter warns the Swiss President that a lucrative 25-year energy deal with Iran would undercut international sanctions in place to deter Iran's dangerous behavior.

"The world community must remain united in our refusal to tolerate Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and sponsorship of terrorism. Contrary to signaling their neutrality, the Swiss deal would send a dangerous message to other governments and private companies that it is okay to ignore international sanctions against the Iranian regime. Further, the agreement would completely undermine global efforts to enforce United Nations Security Council resolutions that require Iran's rulers to suspend their nuclear program," said Rothman, a member of the House Appropriations Committee and its Subcommittees on Defense and State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs.

"We are attempting to send Switzerland a message that an enormous, long-term energy agreement like this proposal would reward Iran as it boldly defies the world community in a relentless drive to acquire nuclear technology," said Saxton, a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee and its Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities. "International efforts led by the United Nations that are attempting to use sanctions to curtail the Iranian's nuclear ambitions would be undermined by the Swiss if this agreement proceeds."

The text of the letter, which has been endorsed by the American Jewish Committee and was sent today, follows (download a printable version here):

The Honorable Pascal Couchepin
President

The Swiss Confederation

Bern, Switzerland

President Couchepin:

We write to express our opposition to the multi-billion dollar deal that Switzerland's Elektrizitaetsgesellschaft Laufenberg (EGL), an energy trading company, signed on March 17, 2008 with the National Iranian Gas Export Company, the Islamic Republic of Iran's state-owned gas firm. We urge you to annul this deal rather than proceed with an agreement that completely undermines the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) efforts to deter Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons and provides a known state sponsor of terrorism with billions of dollars in new assets.

This gas deal, reportedly worth up to \$42 billion, sends a bad message to Iran-that Switzerland condones the Islamic Republic's efforts to obtain nuclear weapons and provide tens of thousands of missiles, as well as funding and other weaponry, to known terrorist organizations such as Hizbollah and Hamas. The international community-including Switzerland-must be united in its efforts to deter Iran's dangerous behavior, which is why we find this energy deal unacceptable.

As you know, Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey has argued that the Iran-Swiss contract is in line with Switzerland's rights as a neutral country and that it does not violate the sanctions regime against Iran. However, the Swiss government's decision to sign lucrative new gas deals with Iran sends precisely the wrong message at a time when Iran continues to defy UNSC resolutions requiring it to suspend its nuclear program. Further, while the sanctions regime that the UNSC has already passed specifically targets Iranian banks in an effort to isolate the financial institutions that fund Iran's nuclear program and its transfer of missiles and weaponry to terrorist groups, Iran's energy sector is arguably even more critical to Iran's economy. Therefore this sector in particular should be cut off by the international community to send a powerful message that Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons and sponsorship of terrorism will not be tolerated.

Finally, Foreign Minister Calmy-Rey's decision to publicly sign this deal alongside Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has repeatedly called for the destruction of the Jewish State of Israel, a UN Member state and the only democracy in the Middle East, undercuts efforts by the UN to isolate the Islamic Republic for its menacing behavior. We are gravely concerned that other governments or private companies will see Switzerland's actions as a sign that investing in Iran's energy section, or other parts of its economy, is acceptable in spite of the international sanctions regime against Iran, a message that we strongly discourage.

For these reasons, we urge you to take action swiftly to annul the natural gas deal between Switzerland and Iran. In addition to straining U.S.-Swiss relations, this energy agreement will erode the international community's efforts to isolate and deter Iran from pursuing a dangerous nuclear program and continuing its financial support for terrorist organizations. We encourage you to take a leadership role by terminating this agreement immediately and look forward to your kind and prompt reply.

Sincerely,

Steven R. Rothman

Jim Saxton

Robert A. Brady

Eliot L. Engel

Ron Klein

Barney Frank

Shelley Berkley

Dan Burton

Louise McIntosh Slaughter

Mark Steven Kirk

Frank A. LoBiondo

Nita Lowey

Rick Renzi

Frank R. Wolf

Zach Wamp

Mike Ferguson

Eric Cantor

Doug Lamborn

Howard Coble

Debbie Wasserman Schultz

Thaddeus G. McCotter

Ken Calvert

Alcee L. Hastings

Albert Russell Wynn

Scott Garrett

Anthony D. Weiner

Brad Sherman